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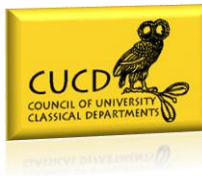
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A level Classics poverty

Classical subjects in schools in England: access, attainment and progression

by **Steven Hunt** and **Arlene Holmes-Henderson**

Introduction – ‘Classics poverty’

Universities are under regulatory pressure to admit more students from state-maintained schools (Office for Students, 2020; Russell Group, 2019), especially Classics Departments. It could also be said that university programmes could benefit from an intake of students drawn from different educational backgrounds from across the country. However, there are very few state-maintained schools in the UK in which any classical subjects at all are taught at A level. State-maintained schools which *do* offer them tend to be selective and/or in London and the South East. There are huge geographical ‘gaps’ in the UK where students cannot access any classical subjects at A level. Even in the schools where the subjects are offered, classical subjects are fragile: the majority of classes consist of five or fewer students. The authors define this lack of access to schools which offer classical subjects at A level and earlier as ‘classics poverty’.

The authors reflect on the continued viability of A levels in all classical subjects as they stand, the paucity of opportunities to study Latin and Ancient Greek in state-maintained schools in almost every part of the UK, and the perverse failure of Classical Civilisation and Ancient History in sixth form colleges to deliver the grades for access to university classics courses. We intend that this article will be useful for a range of stakeholders. These include: university academics and professional services staff when designing and implementing admissions protocols for undergraduate applicants; educationalists and policymakers when reviewing support for classical subjects at the school level; and examinations officers, when planning for the support and development of future qualifications. With this in mind, we finish with some recommendations for further research and strategic planning.

‘Classics poverty’ has been a feature of the story of secondary school classics education in the UK for more than 50 years. In the 1960s-70s many of the grammar schools, where Latin and Greek had been strong, became comprehensive schools and in many cases lost the subjects. A number of ex-grammar schools chose to become independent schools and, in many but not all cases, held onto them. The education reforms of Kenneth Baker in 1988 provided almost no curriculum space for schools in the state-maintained sector to offer

classical subjects, and Local Management of Schools meant that there was little money available to headteachers for curriculum enhancement. This dealt a blow to Latin and Ancient Greek in the state-maintained sector from which it has never really recovered (Forrest, 1996; Lister, 2007). The rise of Ofsted in the 2000s and the culture of schools being held accountable by examination results, have continued to focus headteachers' minds on the national curriculum subjects and the sorts of examinations which could most easily and reliably provide evidence of success (Hunt, 2016). More recently, the education reforms of Michael Gove, though ostensibly more convivial towards Latin and Ancient Greek, have exacerbated the situation: school funding cuts, together with the insistence on linear A levels and the marginalisation of AS levels have led to many schools only offering their students 3 A level subjects (Hunt, 2018, 2020). Latin, Greek, Classical Civilisation and Ancient History are at risk if insufficient numbers of students choose them.

In this climate, Latin and Greek, almost cut off at Key Stage 3 (students aged 11-13), struggle to survive at Key Stage 4 (students aged 14-16) and can barely get a look-in at A level. Today, Latin is very much the preserve of independent schools and state-maintained selective schools in the South and South-East of England. Greek is almost completely absent from the state-maintained sector, and, where it is present in that sector, almost entirely taught at exam level in London. Classical Civilisation is more balanced between the two sectors, with larger numbers than both Latin and Ancient Greek combined. Ancient History is stronger in the state-maintained sector but significantly smaller in overall numbers compared to Classical Civilisation.

As mentioned above, in 11-18 schools in both state-maintained and independent sectors, the number of students entering classical subjects of all kinds at A level is very small and no doubt school bursars take a good, hard look at the financial viability of classes each year. On the other hand, Classical Civilisation and Ancient History have often been seen to be the subjects 'of the future': they *should* be able to be taught to more students, in more schools, without necessarily having the sort of classical languages specialist teacher that Latin or Greek requires, and which are increasingly in short supply (Hall, 2015; Holmes-Henderson 2017). Students do not need to have studied the non-linguistic classical subjects previously before taking them at A level. They often go on to enrol in classical studies at university level (Khan-Evans, 2018).

This article shows that these 2 subjects do indeed attract large numbers of students to make viable groups at A level in state-maintained schools. Indeed, these subjects are more widely available in all parts of the country – not just in London and the South-East. One of the reasons for this is because they are particularly strong in numbers in sixth form colleges, which serve areas of the UK where other classical subjects are rarely offered outside the independent sector. The sixth form colleges, then, *should* provide a ready supply of students to university. However, students' attainment in these subjects in these large cohort entries in sixth form colleges appears to be very patchy: the very subjects in the very schools which *should* provide students for many of the classical studies courses in the UK do not *seem* to be functioning as well as they might.

Research process

Recently, *CUCD Bulletin* has started to provide the entry figures for the 4 classical subjects at all levels of examination (CUCD, 2019). These figures paint a broad picture of the 'state of play', but they conceal much of the underlying detail, school by school, and area by area. The headline figures hide the 'classics poverty' of the majority of the country, that is, the lack of access which students have in the majority of the country to state-maintained, non-selective schools where at least 1 classical subject is offered.

The authors have drawn on the statistical returns provided by the Department for Education, for A levels in Latin, Greek, Classical Civilisation and Ancient History taken in 2019 (Department for Education, n.d.)¹. We focused only on A Level. We have chosen not to use the 2020 figures as the public health situation meant that examinations for that year were cancelled amid some disarray (for details of the effect of the changes on schools, see Dixon [2020] and Hunt [2021]). We felt that the results, based on centre-assessed grades rather than through examination, are not as representative as those from 2019.

For each classical subject, we present the following information:

- 1) Total examination entry
- 2) School distribution between state-maintained selective, state-maintained non-selective and independent sectors
- 3) Number and geographical distribution of schools/sixth form colleges.

The authors further analysed the entry cohort sizes and attainment for A level Latin, Greek, Classical Civilisation and Ancient History in state-maintained schools, with a particular interest, in the last 2 subjects, in sixth form colleges and other colleges of further education (all henceforth referred to as 'sixth form colleges'). The authors' view was that the sixth form colleges, being on the whole non-selective and widely geographically distributed, had the potential to provide greater access to study of classical subjects in Higher Education than other routes. It should be noted that the Department for Education's statistical surveys did not release student numbers for centres which presented five or fewer students. Therefore, some estimations have been made for the pie charts (which assume an even distribution of 2-4 students depending number of centres falling into this category, for each classical subject).

Background details

In 2019 there were 3,448 state-maintained secondary schools in England. The average size of a state-maintained secondary school was 965 students. There were 2,319 independent secondary schools in England. The average size of an independent secondary school was 251 students (Department for Education, 2019b).

There are 164 selective schools ('grammar schools') in England. Most are located in London and the South East (see the useful map on the BBC website for the geographical distribution [BBC, 2016]).

¹ The authors wish to acknowledge the helpful contributions of the following people to this article: Alex Orgee, Peter Swallow and Bella Watts.

Latin A level

1121 students sat A Level Latin in 2019. Figure 1 shows that 76% of these were in independent schools, 12% were in selective state-maintained schools, and 12% were in state-maintained non-selective schools.

It is clear that the majority of entries are from the independent sector, accounting for more than three quarters of the total.

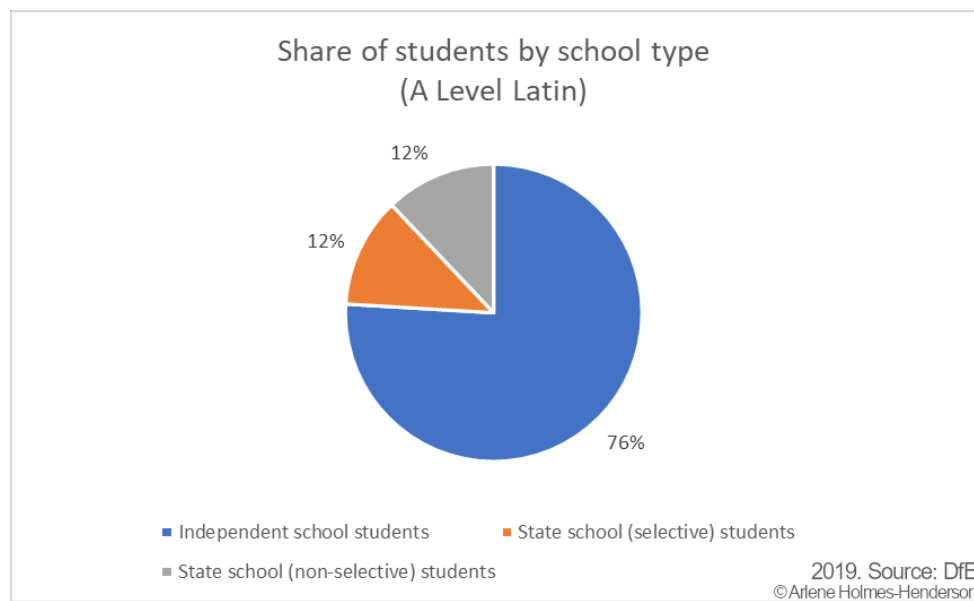


Figure 1: Share of students by school type (A level Latin). © Arlene Holmes-Henderson.

68 state-maintained schools entered students for Latin A level (2% of all state-maintained schools). 189 independent schools entered students for Latin A level (8% of all independent schools). This suggests that a student is four times more likely to be able enter A level Latin in an independent school than in a state-maintained school.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the 68 state-maintained schools by each local authority in England, where A level Latin candidates were entered for examination in 2019. 40 of the 113 local authorities in England had state-maintained schools which offered A Level Latin.

In the 32 London authorities there were 19 state-maintained schools which entered candidates. In the rest of England, there were 49 state-maintained schools which offered A level Latin in total. The likelihood of being able to attend a state-maintained school which offered A level Latin was much higher in London and the South East than anywhere else.

The distribution of state-maintained schools by each local authority in England, where A level Latin candidates were entered for examination in 2019.		
Local Authority	Number of schools in England	Details
Barnet (London)	3	2 selective, 1 non-selective
Bexley (London)	1	1 selective
Bolton	1	1 non-selective
Brighton and Hove	1	1 non-selective
Bromley (London)	1	1 selective
Buckinghamshire	4	4 selective
Cambridgeshire	2	1 non-selective, 1 sixth form college
Camden (London)	1	1 non-selective
Cheshire West and Chester	1	1 non-selective
Cornwall	1	1 sixth form college
Croydon (London)	1	1 non-selective
Cumbria	1	1 non-selective
Essex	5	1 non-selective, 4 selective
Hackney (London)	1	1 non-selective
Hammersmith and Fulham (London)	2	2 non-selective
Hampshire	1	1 sixth form college
Harrow (London)	2	2 non-selective
Hertfordshire	4	3 non-selective 1 selective
Isle of Wight	1	1 non-selective
Kensington and Chelsea	2	2 non-selective
Kent	3	3 selective
Kingston upon Thames (London)	2	2 non-selective
Lancashire	2	1 non-selective, 1 selective
Lewisham (London)	1	1 non-selective
Lincolnshire	2	2 selective
Liverpool	1	1 selective
Milton Keynes	1	1 sixth form college
Oxfordshire	2	2 non-selective
Plymouth	1	1 selective
Reading	1	1 selective
Slough	1	1 selective
Sunderland	1	1 selective
Surrey	3	1 selective/ 2 sixth form colleges
Sutton (London)	2	2 selective
Trafford	1	1 selective
Wandsworth (London)	1	1 non-selective
Warwickshire	2	1 non-selective, 1 selective
Wiltshire	2	1 non-selective, 1 selective
Windsor and Maidenhead	1	1 non-selective
Wirral	1	1 non-selective
Wolverhampton	1	1 non-selective
Total	68	30 selective 11-18 6 sixth form colleges

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Figure 2: The distribution of state-maintained schools by each local authority in England, where A level Latin candidates were entered for examination in 2019. © Steven Hunt.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of A Level Latin by geographical region in England. Of all the 68 state-maintained schools which did enter candidates, 30 (44%) were academically selective. Only 6 sixth form colleges in England entered candidates for A level Latin. It is unlikely that sixth form colleges are able to provide sufficient teaching for sixth form students who have not already taken GCSE Latin in their 11-16 schools. Thus, sixth form colleges which provide Latin are only able to do so because they serve areas where Latin is already offered in local secondary schools. Students' access to state-maintained schools which offer Latin is often restricted by the schools' selectivity or the students' own prior school experience.

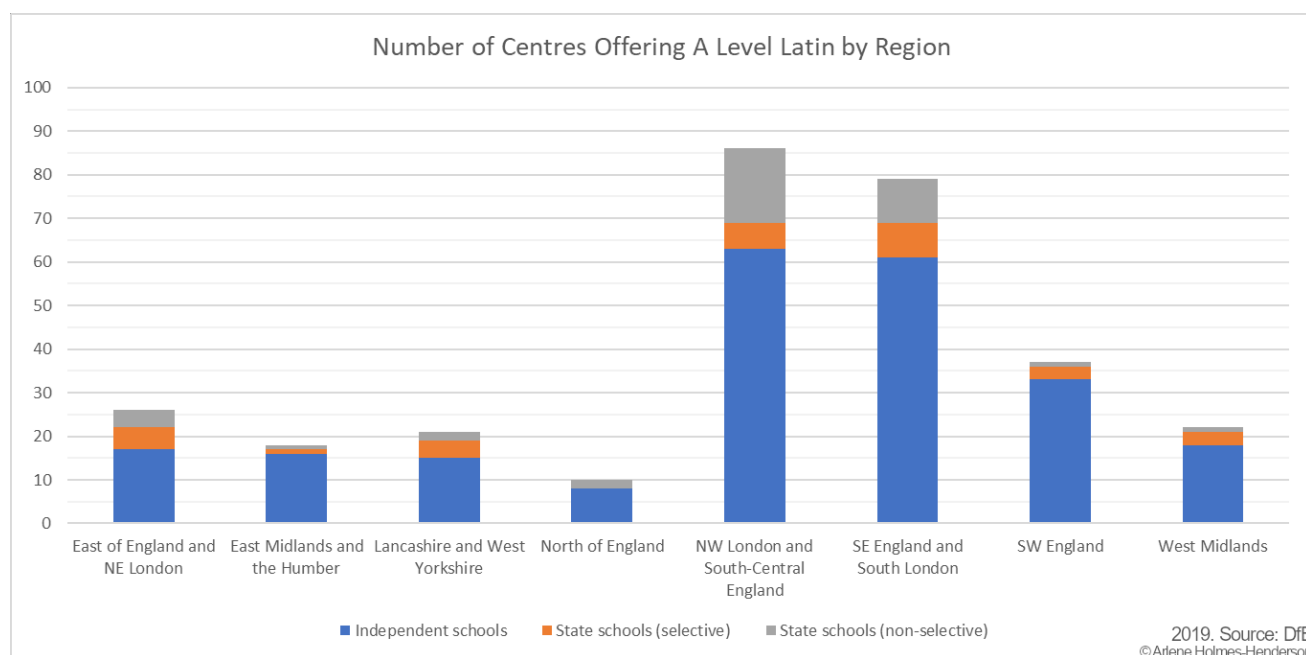


Figure 3: Number of Centres Offering Latin by Region. © Arlene Holmes-Henderson.

Cohort entry numbers, per school, for A level Latin are small and fragile. Of the 68 state-maintained schools which offered A level Latin, 56 (82%) entered 5 or fewer students. The support of such small numbers is often entirely due to the discretion of the headteacher, school governors or a Multi Academy Trust executive. Under current school funding arrangements, where the funding follows the student, support can easily be withdrawn.

Figure 4 lists the top 10 state-maintained schools for A level Latin by entry cohort size. Attainment grades are also included. Even in these schools – which entered the largest number of students – the cohort size was overall very small. This means even these departments are highly vulnerable to reductions in school funding or changes in the curriculum interests of the senior leadership, for example.

Of the top 10 schools by entry cohort size, 9 are academically or otherwise selective. Only 2 schools are outside London and the South East. Of the total entries (104), 72 students (69%) achieved grades A* and A, these being the requirements for most 'traditional' Classics courses in UK universities. 93% of the students in these schools attained A*-B, which provide access to most UK universities. Therefore, if you are fortunate enough to be able to attend these schools, your attainment in Latin is likely to provide access to a selective UK university.

The top ten state-maintained schools for A level Latin by entry cohort size, showing number of A*-B grades awarded.				
School (anonymised)	Number of candidate s entered	Grades attained at A*-B		
		A*	A	B
London, mixed, non-selective ²	15	11	2	2
North-West, mixed, selective	14	3	9	2
London, girls, selective	13	3	8	2
South-East, girls, selective	11	1	5	5
London, mixed, non-selective	10	0	2	2
East, mixed, selective	10	2	5	2
South-East, boys, selective	9	6	3	0
West Midlands, boys, selective	8	2	4	2
London, girls, selective	7	2	2	2
South West, mixed, selective	7	0	2	2
TOTAL	104	30	42	21

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Figure 4: The top ten state-maintained schools for A level Latin by entry cohort size, showing number of A*-B grades awarded. © Steven Hunt.

Greek A Level

213 candidates sat A Level Greek in 2019. Figure 5 shows the overall distribution between school sectors. 92% were in independent schools, 5% were in state-maintained selective schools, and 3% were in state-maintained non-selective schools.

² By 'non-selective', we mean that the school does not select academically by examination. There may, however, be a religious membership requirement for attendance at some schools.

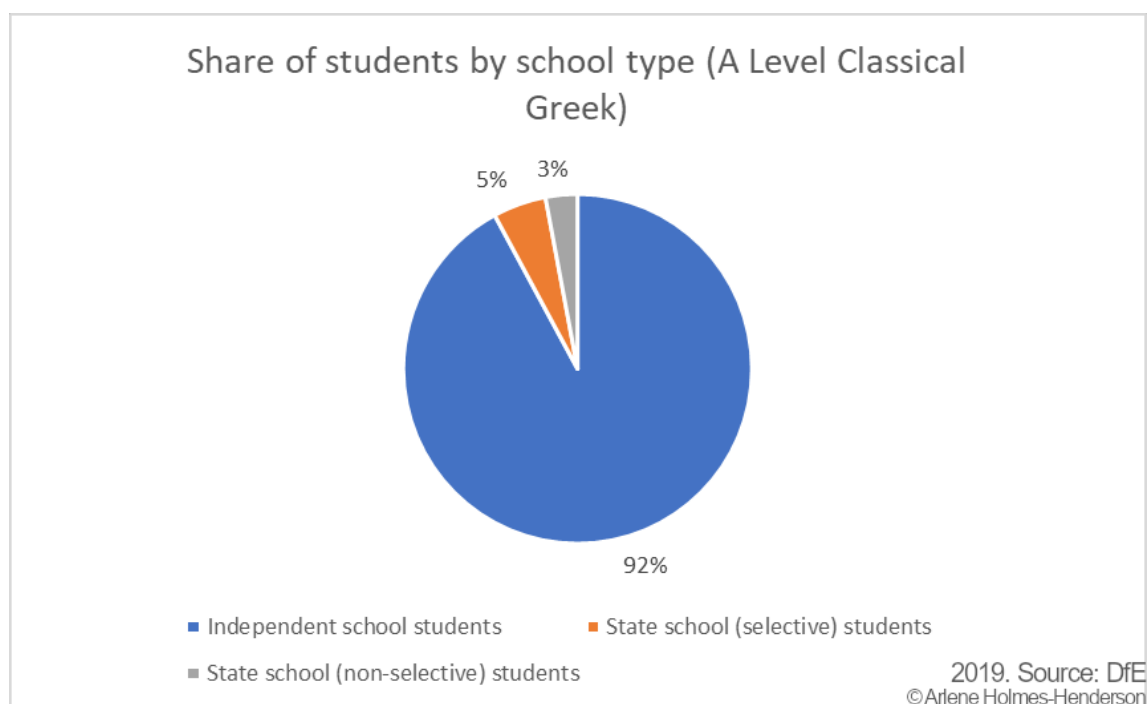


Figure 5: Share of students by school type (A level Greek). © Arlene Holmes-Henderson.

86 independent schools entered students for Greek A level (3.7% of total independent schools). By contrast, only 8 state-maintained schools in the whole of England entered students for Greek A level (0.2% of state-maintained schools). Figure 6 shows the distribution of state-maintained schools by each local authority in England, where A level Greek candidates were entered for examination in 2019. 6 of these 8 are academically or otherwise selective.

All local authorities in England, where state-maintained schools entered candidates were entered for examination for A level Greek in 2019.		
Local Authority	Number of schools	Details
Essex	1	1 selective
Hammersmith and Fulham (London)	1	1 non-selective
Hampshire	1	1 sixth form college
Harrow (London)	1	1 non-selective
Kent	1	1 selective
Kingston upon Thames	1	1 selective
Sutton (London)	1	1 selective
Warwickshire	1	1 selective
Total	8	5 selective 11-18 2 non-selective 11-18 1 selective (by prior attainment) sixth form college

© Steven Hunt, 2021

Figure 6: All local authorities in England, where state-maintained schools entered candidates were entered for examination for A level Greek in 2019. © Steven Hunt.

The regional distribution of schools which entered students for A level Greek in 2019 was, even more so than Latin, heavily skewed towards schools in London and the South East (see Figure 6 below). Extraordinarily, there were only two state-maintained schools outside London and the South East which entered students for A level Greek, both of which were selective.

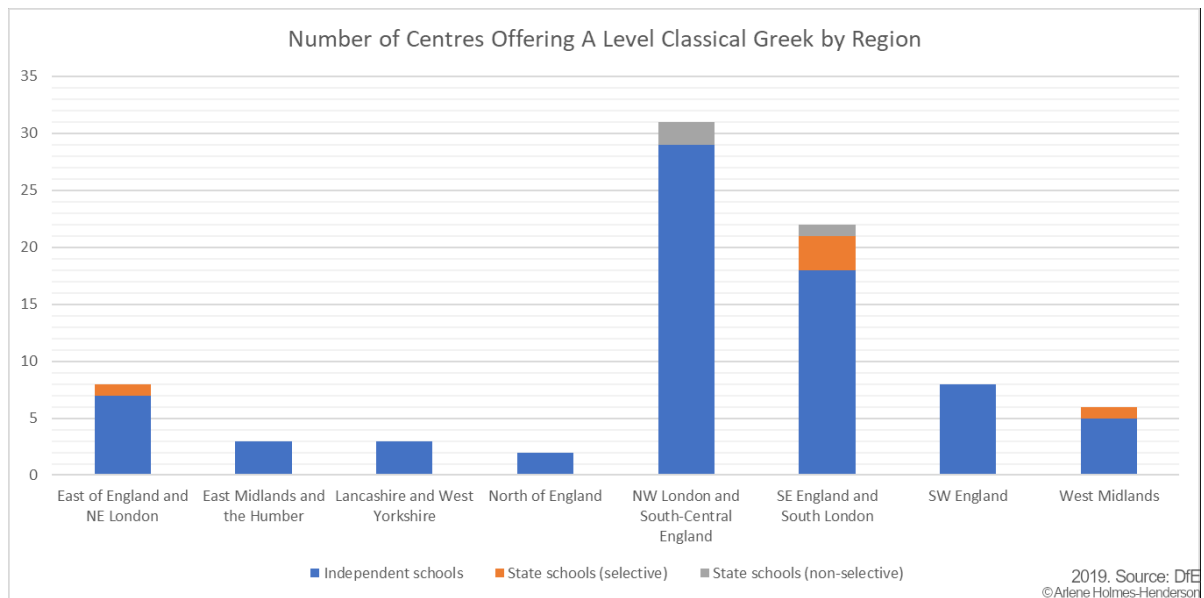


Figure 7: Number of Centres Offering A level Classical Greek by Region. © Arlene Holmes-Henderson.

The authors wanted to find out the cohort size and student attainment for A level Greek in each of the 8 state-maintained schools which offered it. The results are given in Figure 8 below.

All state-maintained schools which entered candidates for A level Greek in 2019.				
School (anonymised)	Number of candidates entered	Grades attained at A*-B		
		A*	A	B
South-East, boys, selective	<5	As the entry cohort is 5 or fewer, the DfE does not provide a breakdown of grades attained.		
London, mixed, non-selective ³	<5			
South-West, mixed, selective	<5			
London, mixed, non-selective	<5			
South-East, girls, selective	<5			
London, girls, selective	<5			
London, girls, selective	<5			
West Midlands, boys, selective	<5			
© Steven Hunt, 2021				

Figure 8: All state-maintained schools which entered candidates for A level Greek in 2019 © Steven Hunt.

The cohort size is clearly very small: no state-maintained schools in England entered more than 5 candidates. The subject is highly vulnerable if schools suffer any reduction in funding.

For comparison, the authors also analysed the entry cohort sizes for Greek in the independent sector. Here too, it was very small: only six of the independent schools which offer A level Greek entered more than five candidates.⁴

Attainment at A level for Greek is amongst the highest for any subject studied. In 2019, 78.6% of candidates were awarded grades A* and A – the most by some distance for any subject offered by OCR (2019).

To conclude, it is almost a miracle that a student is able to study A level Greek in a state-maintained school in England. We know that attainment for this tiny group is very high. However, Greek is even more vulnerable to funding changes than Latin, in schools in the maintained sector. It is similarly vulnerable throughout the independent sector.

³ See note 2 above.

⁴ These were (entry cohort size in brackets): Eton College (17), City of London School (8), Magdalen College School (7), Brighton College (7), St Paul's Girls' School (6) and Oundle School (6).

Classical Civilisation and Ancient History

The authors have chosen to discuss the entries for Classical Civilisation and Ancient History together, as they share similar characteristics.

2946 candidates were entered for A level Classical Civilisation in 2019. Figure 9 shows the overall distribution of student entries between school sectors. 33% were in independent schools, 16% were in state-maintained selective schools, and 51% were in state-maintained non-selective schools/sixth form colleges.

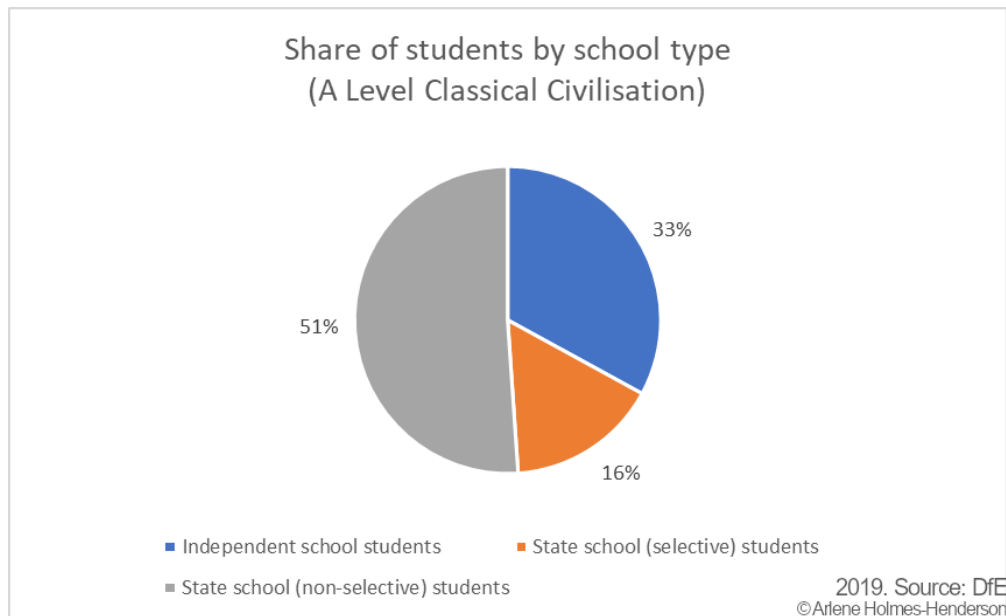


Figure 9: Share of students by school type (A level Classical Civilisation). © Arlene Holmes-Henderson.

200 independent schools entered candidates (8.6% of all independent schools), and 182 state-maintained schools (5.3% of all state-maintained schools). Figure 10 shows the geographical distribution of these schools. It can be seen that, broadly, the distribution of schools where students were entered for A level Classical Civilisation was more evenly balanced across England, and also between state-maintained and independent sectors. Although the East Midlands and the North of England experienced more classics poverty than other areas of the country.

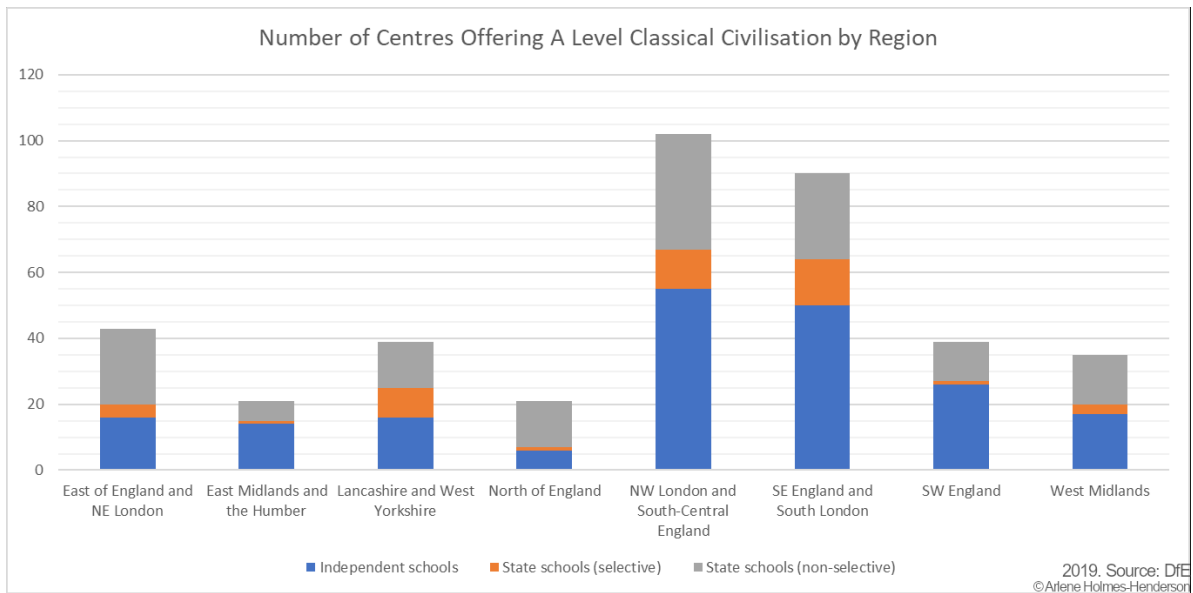


Figure 10: Number of Centres Offering A Level Classical Civilisation by Region. © Arlene Holmes-Henderson.

The number of students entered for Ancient History A level was about a quarter the size as that for Classical Civilisation. 676 students nationally were entered for A Level Ancient History in 2019. Figure 11 shows the overall distribution of student entries between school sectors. 14% were in independent schools, 27% were in state-maintained selective schools, and 59% were in state-maintained non-selective schools/sixth form colleges.

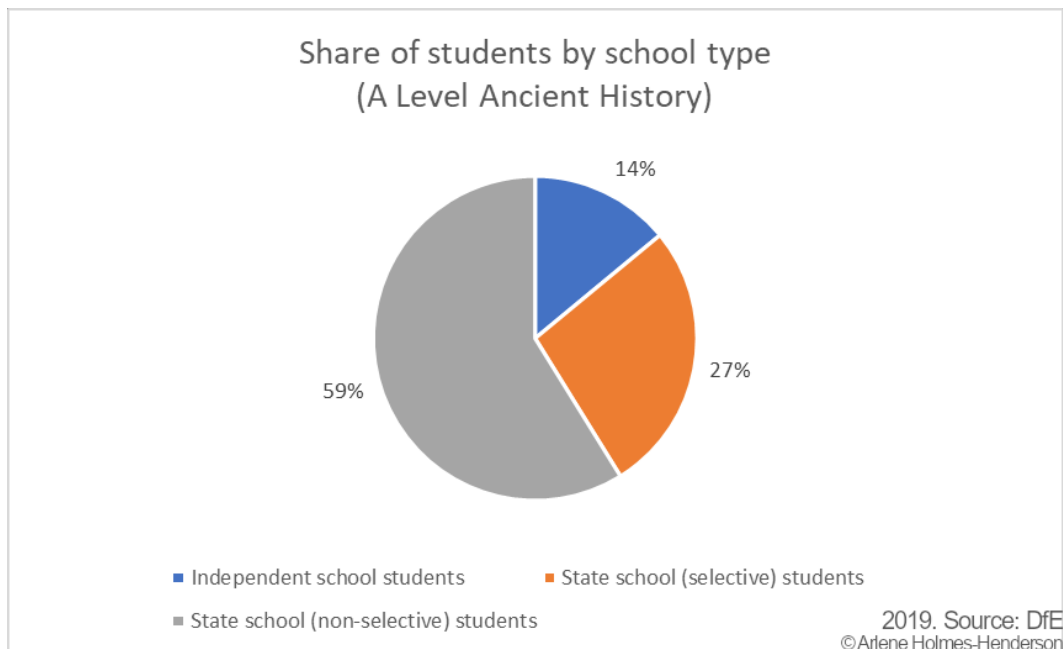


Figure 11: Share of students by school type (A Level Ancient History). © Arlene Holmes-Henderson.

Twice as many schools in the state-maintained sector entered candidates as in the independent sector: 46 state-maintained (1.3% of all state-maintained schools) compared to 20 independent schools (0.86% of all independent schools). Figure 12 shows the geographical distribution of these schools. It can be seen that schools from both independent and state-maintained sectors which offer A level Ancient History are widely distributed throughout England.

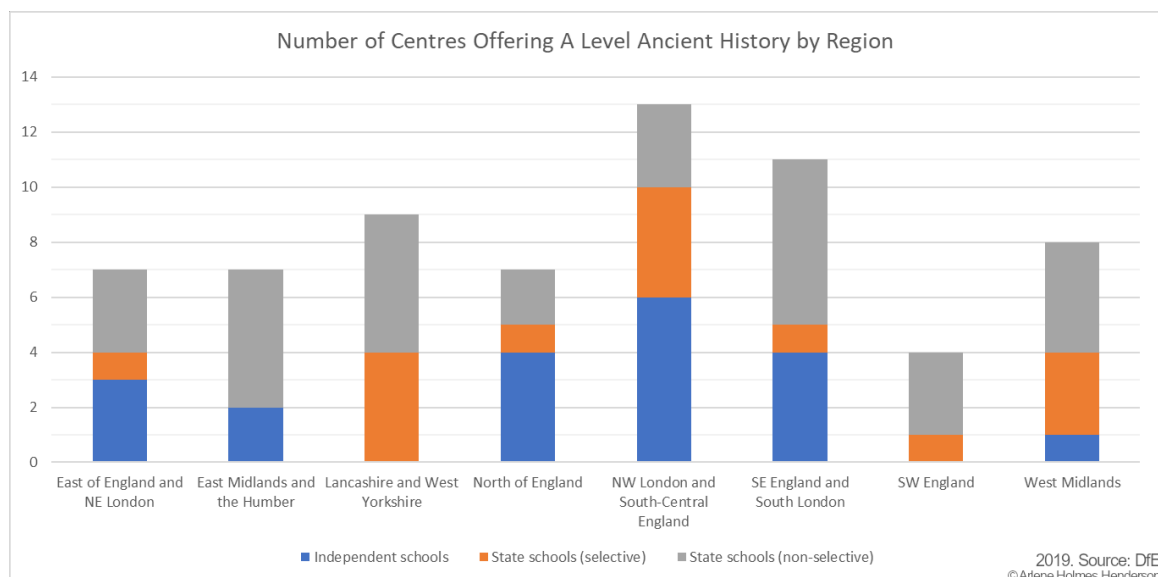


Figure 12: Number of Centres Offering A Level Ancient History by Region. © Arlene Holmes-Henderson.

The authors identified all local authorities in England where state-maintained schools entered candidates for A level Classical Civilisation and Ancient History examinations in 2019. In some cases, the same school offered both Classical Civilisation and Ancient History⁵. Details can be found in Appendix 1.

The data show that opportunities for students to study Classical Civilisation and Ancient History in the non-selective state-maintained sector were much greater than those for Latin or Greek. The authors note that Classics poverty is alleviated to some extent by schools being able to offer these qualifications. The centres were much more widely spread geographically across England than those for the other subjects. 97 out of 113 local authorities in England have at least one centre where students were able to study Classical Civilisation or Ancient History in 2019. 53 sixth form colleges entered students for A level Classical Civilisation and 21 for A level Ancient History. While many sixth form colleges have admission requirements, these are not particularly onerous⁶. Students should, therefore, be able to access A level courses in Classical Civilisation and Ancient History more easily than those in Latin or Greek,

⁵ State-maintained schools which offered both A level Classical Civilisation and Ancient History in 2019 were in Bury, Cornwall, Dudley, East Sussex, Hampshire, Manchester, Newcastle upon Tyne, Oxfordshire, Solihull and Swindon.

⁶ Typical admissions requirements for study at a sixth form college is 2 GCSEs at grade 5 or higher, and 3 GCSEs at grade 4 (including English and Maths).

both because the state-maintained schools which offered them were more widespread geographically, and because most were non-selective. Moreover, students did not have to have studied classical subjects of any kind prior to enrolment in an A level course in Classical Civilisation or Ancient History.

Progression to Higher Education through A levels in Classical Civilisation and Ancient History

Sixth form colleges and classical subjects

As mentioned above, in 2019 53 sixth form colleges entered candidates for A level Classical Civilisation and 21 entered candidates for A level Ancient History. The authors decided to look more closely at the cohort sizes and attainment for students in the sixth form colleges and further education colleges. A large number of centres, more accessible to all students, and widely geographically dispersed, should provide a pathway to further study of classical subjects at university.

Classical Civilisation

The authors analysed the cohort size and student attainment of the sixth form colleges in each local authority in England where A level Classical Civilisation candidates were entered for examination in 2019. Details are in Appendix 2.

There were 53 sixth form colleges which entered candidates for A level Classical Civilisation in 2019. 8 of these had 5 or fewer candidates (15%). 18 had 10 or fewer candidates (34%).

The authors disregarded the 8 centres which entered 5 candidates or fewer, as the DfE does not provide a breakdown of grades achieved in cohorts of this size.

The remaining 45 centres accounted for 963 entries altogether. Of these 963 candidates, 16 were awarded grade A* (1.6%), 135 were awarded grade A (14%), and 310 were awarded grade B (32%). Cumulatively 461 entrants were awarded grades A*-B (47.6%). This compares unfavourably with the attainment of the national cohort (which includes independent schools and other state-maintained school sixth forms) in which 59.4% of entrants were awarded A*-B grades⁷ (OCR, 2019).

The authors analysed the distribution of the grades across the sixth form colleges. This revealed some surprises.

Only 12 out of the 45 centres had cohorts in which any grade A*s were awarded. In 9 of these, some in large cohort sizes, only 1 student was awarded a grade A*. In 33 (73.3%) sixth form colleges, no student was awarded a grade A*.

Only 26 out of the 45 had cohorts in which any grade As were awarded. In 12 of these, some in large cohort sizes, only 1 student was awarded a grade A.

⁷ While direct comparisons are difficult, it is worth noting that students who took OCR A level examinations in English Literature and History (two examinations broadly similar in content and skills to classical ones) attained a greater proportion of top grades, with 65.7% and 57.1% grades A*-B respectively (OCR, 2019), than in Classical Civilisation or Ancient History.

7 (16%) had cohorts in which no student was awarded either a grade A* or grade A – these being the grades considered necessary for acceptance into the most selective Russell Group universities.

Ancient History

The authors also analysed the cohort size and student attainment of the sixth form colleges in each local authority in England where A level Ancient History candidates were entered for examination in 2019. Details are in Appendix 3.

There were 21 sixth form colleges which entered candidates for A level Ancient History in 2019. 2 of these had 5 or fewer candidates. 6 had 10 or fewer candidates. While the total number of comparable centres is smaller than that for Classical Civilisation, the centre cohort sizes are, however, generally larger and, perhaps, more financially viable.

The authors disregarded the 2 centres which entered 5 candidates or fewer. The remaining 19 centres accounted for 419 entries.

Of the 419 candidates, only 8 were awarded grade A* (1.9%). 51 were awarded grade A (12.1%), and 136 were awarded grade B (32.4%). Cumulatively 195 were awarded grades A*-B (46.5%). This also compares unfavourably with the attainment of the national cohort (which includes independent schools and other state-maintained school sixth forms) in which 55.2% of entrants were awarded A*-B grades⁸ (OCR, 2019).

Of these 19 centres, 12 (63%) had cohorts in which no student achieved a grade A*, and 4 (21%) had cohorts in which no student achieved either a grade A* or a grade A.

It seems that although sixth form colleges have larger, more financially-viable entry cohorts for both A level Classical Civilisation and A level Ancient History, students find it very challenging to attain the highest grades.

Discussion

Compared to classical languages, Classical Civilisation and Ancient History at A Level are taught in many more state-maintained schools than Latin or Greek, attract large numbers of students, and are much more geographically widespread. They are also potentially more accessible to students because they do not require any prior subject-specific knowledge. But the examination results that are being gained by the vast majority of students who choose these subjects (in 2019 at least) did not seem to provide as much access to higher education as one might expect, especially to the highly selective Russell Group institutions, where many university Classics departments are located.

The A Level exam in these subjects does not seem to be providing a successful launchpad for students, in the numbers one would expect, for the universities for which the courses themselves have been designed.

The reasons for this are unclear but need to be investigated urgently. Theories espoused to date have included: differential prior knowledge of students; lack of teacher training and support; ever-decreasing budgets for the further education sector (House of Commons, 2020);

⁸ See note 7 above.

inaccurate and inaccessible resources; and the ‘bedding in’ of new courses. The authors work in teacher training and subject advocacy. They caution that no subject can grow if there is a lack of confidence in the curriculum and assessment framework.

Access to Higher Education through the traditional route of the study of Latin and Greek at A level is increasingly dependent on the independent sector. Classical languages exist mostly (although not exclusively) in state-maintained selective schools or independent schools, and in London and the South East. Greek is now so small that the retirement of a single teacher, and the (all too common) consequent loss of a Classics department, has a significant impact on the national number of examination presentations. Much work must be done to see it maintained in future. Although Latin is currently stronger than Greek, its future sustainability is worrisome. This is especially the case in the state-maintained sector where a minimum ‘viable’ class size at A Level is usually required⁹.

Recommendations

University admissions officers

Colleagues in universities should be aware of the statistical analysis provided here. If university classics departments become dependent on an ever-decreasing pool of candidates with A Levels in classical subjects, they will get into trouble for two reasons. Firstly, they will miss out on high quality candidates from parts of the country where classical subjects simply are not available in any school or sixth form college as a result of the ‘classics poverty’ we have outlined above. These promising students must not be penalised for the inequality of access to classics. When setting admission requirements, we therefore recommend that university classics department base them on curriculum subjects which are universally available in schools around the country. Only by doing so are universities levelling the playing field for those who experience classics poverty. This move, with appropriate communication via departmental websites, social media and UCAS, is likely to contribute to the part-fulfilment of university access and participation plans which prioritise attracting applicants from less advantaged backgrounds.

Secondly, universities cannot usefully continue making the same offers if students repeatedly fail to secure the required grades. Until research can be conducted into what it is about the Classical Civilisation and Ancient History exams that renders them insufficient in meeting the needs of many universities, we suggest that all university classics departments consider operating a model of contextual offers (Office for Students, 2019).

Policymakers

There is currently moderate policy support for Latin and Greek in the primary school curriculum where Latin and Greek are listed as languages suitable for study by children aged 6-11 (Department for Education, 2013a). In the same phase (Key Stage 2), children learn about the Greeks and Romans in the History curriculum (Department for Education, 2013b). The policy

⁹ Hunt recalls two recent conversations which help illustrate this matter. The first with an experienced teacher of Latin in a one-man department in the North of England, who reported that after near ten years of persuasion, the Headteacher, supportive of Latin in the school, had finally agreed to authorise A level Latin for five students as a trial. In another case, the Head of Classics at a leading state-maintained school in London was disallowed from offering A level Greek because ‘only’ nine students had been recruited.

support reappears at Key Stage 4 where Latin, Greek and Ancient History ‘count’ towards the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) performance measure (Department for Education, 2019a). This support is not enough: the disappearance of classics between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 i.e. at Key Stage 3 (ages 12-14) is a devastating blow to the growth of the subject in schools. Recruitment of students at GCSE becomes extremely difficult: in many cases learners are selecting an ‘unknown’ subject and covering an entire language GCSE (in the case of Latin/Greek) in 2 years, often being taught before/after school. If classics were given more governmental support and prominence in curriculum policy, school leaders would make space on the timetable for classics lessons during the school day in Key Stage 3 and numbers sitting exams at GCSE and A Level would, in time, look healthier. Understandably, the Department for Education is primarily focussed on developing policy initiatives which will benefit the 93% of English learners in the state-maintained sector. As the statistics above make clear, there currently exists a paucity of classics in this sector, and so any increased attention in curriculum policy would have implications for teacher training.

Provision for teacher training in all classical subjects is small. The current HEI-based PGCE courses are based at the University of Cambridge, King’s College London and the University of Sussex. Numbers are currently uncapped, but the small number of local school placements limits overall provision to fewer than 50 teacher trainees per year. A number of school-centred initial teacher training courses (‘SCITTs’) focusing on classical subjects have emerged since the education reforms of 2010-2014, bringing the total number of places to 76 in 2020-21 (Hunt, 2020). Nearly all of the SCITTs are in schools in London and the South East. The most stable and long-term ITT providers for classical subjects outside this geographical area are the King Edwards’ Consortium in Birmingham and the Liverpool College SCITT in Liverpool. Between them, they are able to provide perhaps 6 training places per year. Coventry University has launched a new PGCE in Latin with Classics (Holmes-Henderson was an advisor) which will run for the first time in 2021. Efforts to establish more teacher training in the North East and in the South West have fallen on deaf ears – despite there being (as the authors have shown) a significant demand at the sixth form level in those areas. In the early years of Michael Gove’s time as Education Minister, the Department for Education funded some courses for teacher training in Latin for state school teachers already qualified in other disciplines, under the aegis of the University of Oxford and organised through the Cambridge School Classics Project and delivered by the one of the authors and other specialists (Hunt, 2018). Funding has long ceased, and it is remarkable now that the Department for Education, apparently so keen to restore classical subjects to the curriculum of state-maintained schools across England in the name of raising standards and student aspirations, has effectively outsourced the responsibility to academic knowledge exchange projects and charities such as the Advocating Classics Education project (Hall & Holmes-Henderson, 2017), Classics in Communities (Holmes-Henderson, 2016, Mitropoulos & Holmes-Henderson, 2016) and Classics for All. University classics departments also deserve congratulations for helping to develop teachers’ subject knowledge through school conferences and increasingly through online continuing professional development – freely accessible to all. The online communities provided by Facebook groups and #classicstwitter show a welcome coming together of school teachers and university academics which was almost unthinkable only a few years ago. However, a concerted effort needs to be made to establish HEI-led ITT in areas of England which are in addition to existing providers and which might, for example, focus on non-linguistic classical subjects. This is a national project and can only work well with Department for Education and University support. Holmes-Henderson’s Research and Public Policy

Partnership with the Department for Education in 2020-2021 is, we hope, a step in the right direction.

Examinations officers

As was discussed above, the current A Level examination in all four classical subjects require revision if they have a sustainable future for the 93% of students in the state-maintained sector. There should be an enquiry into what it is about the A level examinations in Classical Civilisation and Ancient History that seems to thwart success for too many students whose only experience of the subjects is limited to two brief years at sixth from college. Students in the independent sector have the flexibility to choose alternative qualifications if their teachers wish, such as the IGCSE and the Pre-U qualifications (the fact that the Pre-U qualifications are being withdrawn from 2022 does not mean that schools in the independent sector may not decide to develop other qualifications of their own in the future). Students in state-maintained schools must take A Levels¹⁰. The format and content of the current A levels is enshrined in law. Bristow, who was part of the OCR team which developed them, in a new article commissioned for the *Journal of Classics Teaching*, lays bare the regime under which the current examinations were developed (Bristow, forthcoming 2021). She reports that future changes will have to take account of the regulations that Ofqual has devised and which are legal documents. And yet these regulations seem to have more concern for comparability of multiple examinations in a quasi-marketplace of competitive examination boards than for the suitability of the examinations for the teachers who teach them and the students who take them. The regulations envisage an environment in which AQA, Pearson and other examination boards might want to develop new A levels in competition with OCR. This is hypothetical and very unlikely. The number of students is far too small for another examination board to want to take on the risks of the costs of development: AQA withdrew from developing its own A level examination in Classical Civilisation for this very reason. If, therefore, the likelihood of another examination board wishing to develop any one of the four classical subjects at A level is remote, it seems that OCR should either exercise extreme flexibility in interpreting the regulations or, with the support of the Universities and the subject associations (with the Classical Association Teaching Board taking the lead, with support where appropriate from The Historical Association and the Association for Language Learning), actively seek for them to be changed. Leaving the qualifications as they are – the qualifications which are state-mandated and state-enforced and yet which do not do the job that they are intended to do for students in state-maintained schools - should not be considered an option.

Conclusion

At present, access to classics in schools relies on wealth or luck. We describe this inequality of access to the study of the ancient world as 'classics poverty'. Access to A level Latin and Greek is denied to the vast majority of students in England's schools. Without change and targeted support, the subjects may simply die in the state-maintained sector. Ancient History

¹⁰ It is true to say that some state-maintained schools offer the International Baccalaureate (IB), which does contain a Latin option. However, few schools are able to afford the luxury of maintaining both A level and IB routes and the added costs of becoming a purely IB school are substantial. For details of the IB for classical subjects, see Trafford (2017). Some doubt has been raised by the Department for Education about whether they will fund the extra expense of the IB in state-maintained schools (Times Educational Supplement, 2019).

and Classical Civilisation are attractive alternatives and do, indeed, attract students from all backgrounds across England in numbers sufficient to make the subjects financially viable in schools. However, attainment seems to be much lower and while there is less poverty of access, there remains a poverty of progression into Higher Education. And we should remember that students who take examinations in Ancient History or Classical Civilisation use their grades in these subjects to access future educational and professional opportunities in other disciplines, not just those related to classical studies. Why the grades awarded to students in sixth form colleges are to be lower than those awarded across schools nationally is a matter of concern and deserves further research.

We hope that our colleagues in university classics departments will work with us, and with other key stakeholders, to improve the classics education landscape both to ensure the survival of classical subjects in schools and also to make access to the study of the ancient world in schools fairer.

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Appendices

Local authorities in England where there are state-maintained schools which entered candidates for A level Classical Civilisation and / or Ancient History in 2019.		
Local authority	Number of schools entering candidates for A level in...	
	Classical Civilisation	Ancient History
Barnet (London)	4	
Barnsley	1	
Bath and North East Somerset	1	
Bedford	1	
Bexley (London)	2	
Blackburn with Darwen	1	
Blackpool		1
Bolton	2	
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole		1
Brighton and Hove	2	
Bristol, City of	1	
Bromley (London)	1	
Buckinghamshire	6	4
Bury	1	2
Cambridgeshire	1	
Camden (London)	4	
Central Bedfordshire	1	
Cheshire East	1	
Cornwall	1	1
County Durham	1	

Croydon (London)	1	
Devon	6	
Dorset		1
Dudley	3	1
East Riding of Yorkshire	1	1
East Sussex	1	1
Essex	6	2
Gloucestershire	1	
Hackney (London)	1	
Hammersmith and Fulham (London)	1	
Hampshire	6	3
Haringey (London)	1	
Harrow (London)	4	
Hertfordshire	9	1
Hillingdon (London)	3	
Hounslow (London)	3	
Isle of Wight	2	
Islington (London)	2	
Kensington and Chelsea (London)	1	
Kent	7	1
Kingston upon Thames (London)	1	
Kirklees	1	
Lancashire	4	2
Leeds	2	
Leicestershire	1	1
Lincolnshire	2	
Liverpool	1	
Manchester	3	2
Medway	1	
Newcastle upon Tyne	2	1
Norfolk	4	
North East Lincolnshire		1
North Yorkshire	3	2
Northumberland	2	
Oldham		1
Oxfordshire	3	2
Peterborough	3	
Portsmouth	1	
Reading	1	
Redbridge (London)	2	
Redcar and Cleveland	1	
Salford	1	
Sandwell	1	
Sefton	1	1
Sheffield	2	
Shropshire	1	
Slough	1	
Solihull	1	1
Somerset	1	
South Tyneside	1	

Southampton	1	
Southwark (London)	1	
Staffordshire	3	
Stockton-on-Tees	2	
Stoke on Trent	1	
Suffolk	3	2
Sunderland	2	
Surrey	5	2
Sutton (London)	4	
Swindon	1	1
Tameside	2	
Tower Hamlets (London)	3	
Trafford	2	
Walsall		3
Wandsworth (London)	2	
Warrington	1	
Warwickshire	2	2
West Berkshire	1	
West Sussex	1	
Westminster (London)	2	
Wiltshire	1	
Wirral	1	
Wolverhampton	1	
Worcestershire	2	
York		1
Total	182	45

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Appendix 1: Local authorities in England where there are state-maintained schools which entered candidates for A level Classical Civilisation and / or Ancient History in 2019. © Steven Hunt.

Sixth Form Colleges: location, cohort size and attainment at A level Classical Civilisation in 2019.					
Local authority	Name of school (anonymised)	Number of candidate s entered	Grades attained		
			A*	A	B
Dudley	Centre A	60	1	10	21
Hampshire	Centre B	59	2	12	13
Brighton	Centre C	49	1	14	20
Hampshire	Centre D	39	0	9	14
Essex	Centre E	37	0	4	12
Surrey	Centre F	34	1	4	17

Surrey	Centre G	32	2	2	15
Shropshire	Centre H	32	1	3	13
Newcastle	Centre I	31	0	1	6
Somerset	Centre J	30	0	4	9
Brighton	Centre K	30	0	1	8
Gloucester	Centre L	30	0	4	14
Harrow (London)	Centre M	28	1	6	14
Lancashire	Centre N	27	0	7	13
Worcester	Centre O	26	0	3	4
Manchester	Centre P	25	1	4	4
Manchester	Centre Q	23	0	4	10
Cambridge	Centre R	23	4	4	12
Exeter	Centre S	21	0	1	7
Stoke on Trent	Centre T	21	0	3	3
Leeds	Centre U	20	1	0	6
Devon	Centre V	18	0	8	4
Barnsley	Centre W	17	0	0	3
Warrington	Centre X	17	0	1	4
Cornwall	Centre Y	16	0	7	4
Hereford	Centre Z	15	1	1	2
Oxfordshire	Centre AA	15	0	1	2
Slough	Centre BB	14	0	3	4
Solihull	Centre CC	14	0	3	5
Leeds	Centre DD	14	0	2	5
Sefton	Centre EE	14	0	0	2
Essex	Centre FF	13	0	0	

					1
Redcar and Cleveland	Centre GG	13	0	0	5
Salford	Centre HH	13	0	1	5
Hampshire	Centre II	11	0	1	1
Bedfordshire	Centre JJ	10	0	1	2
Portsmouth	Centre KK	10	0	1	5
Kirklees	Centre LL	9	0	0	3
Barnet (London)	Centre MM	9	1	1	4
Tameside	Centre NN	8	0	2	2
Sunderland	Centre OO	8	0	1	4
Bexley (London)	Centre PP	8	0	1	3
Hampshire	Centre QQ	8	0	0	2
Surrey	Centre RR	6	0	0	1
Swindon	Centre SS	6	0	0	2
Tameside	Centre TT	<5	DfE does not provide details		
Lancashire	Centre UU	<5			
Tower Hamlets (London)	Centre VV	<5			
Stockton-on-Tees	Centre WW	<5			
South Tyneside	Centre XX	<5			
Wandsworth (London)	Centre YY	<5			
Bury	Centre ZZ	<5			
Cheshire	Centre AAA	<5			

Appendix 2: Sixth Form Colleges: location, cohort size and attainment at A level Classical Civilisation in 2019. © Steven Hunt.

Sixth Form Colleges: location, cohort size and attainment at A level Ancient History in 2019.					
Local authority	Name of school (anonymised)	Number of candidates entered	Grades attained		
			A*	A	B
Blackpool	College 1	50	2	2	18
Lancashire	College 2	39	0	10	16
Suffolk	College 3	38	0	5	8
Manchester	College 4	33	1	5	10
Leicester	College 5	32	1	7	7
Bury	College 6	27	0	1	4
Surrey	College 7	26	0	3	11
Hampshire	College 8	23	1	9	5
York	College 9	22	1	1	10
Dudley	College 10	19	0	1	1
Solihull	College 11	17	0	1	5
Oldham	College 12	16	1	2	5
Swindon	College 13	15	0	1	6
Warwickshire	College 14	14	0	3	3
Oxford	College 15	12	0	0	4
NE Lincolnshire	College 16	10	0	0	5
Cornwall	College 17	10	1	0	6
Hampshire	College 18	9	0	0	7
Bury	College 19	7	0	0	5
Newcastle Upon Tyne	College 20	<5	DfE does not provide details		
East Sussex	College 21	<5			
	TOTAL	419	8	51	136

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Appendix 3: Sixth Form Colleges: location, cohort size and attainment at A level Ancient History in 2019. © Steven Hunt.

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